

On a Man's Writing

I cannot be content without an accurate sketch of the windings thus far* of a stream which is to bear me on for ever. I try to imagine how it will be to recollect, at a far Distant point of my era, what I was when here ; and wish jf it were possible to retain, as I advance, some clear trace jf the whole course of my existence within the scope of reflection; to fix in my mind so strong an idea of what I have been in this original period of my time, that I may possess this idea in ages too remote for calculation.

The review becomes still more important, when I learn the influence which this first part of the progress will have on the happiness or misery of the next.

One of the greatest difficulties in the way of executing the proposed task will have been caused by the extreme deficiency of that self-observation, which is of no common habit either of youth or any later age. Men are content to have no more intimate sense of their existence than what they feel in the exercise of their faculties on extraneous objects. The vital being, with all its agency and emotions, is so blended and absorbed in these its exterior interests, that it is very rarely collected and concentrated in the consciousness of its own absolute *self*, so as to be recognized as a thing internal, apart and alone, for its own inspection and knowledge. Men carry their minds as for the most part they carry their watches, content to be ignorant of the constitution and action within, and attentive only to the little exterior circle of things, to which the passions, like indexes, are pointing. It is surprising to see how little self-knowledge a person not watchfully observant of himself may have gained in the whole course of an active, or even an inquisitive life. He may have lived almost an age, and traversed a continent, minutely examining its curiosities, and interpreting the half-obliterated characters on its monuments, unconscious the while of a process operating on his own mind, to impress or to erase characteristics of much more importance to him than all the figured brass or marble that Europe contains. After having explored many a cavern or dark, ruinous avenue, he may have left undetected a darker recess within where there would be much more striking discoveries. He may have conversed with many people, in different languages on numberless subjects; but, having neglected those conversations with himself by which his